

En definitiva, tanto el proceso educativo, como las familias y la propia persona, deben de aprovechar las nuevas tecnologías rehabilitadas, para mejorar la calidad de vida de las personas discapacitadas, llevándole a conseguir una mayor autonomía y libertad. ●

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## The Game in Foreign Language Learning in Primary Education

**Título:** The Game in Foreign Language Learning in Primary Education. **Target:** "Maestros de Inglés". **Asignatura:** Inglés. **Autor:** Anabeth Cerpa Vega, Maestra, Especialidad en Educación Física. Nivel C1 de Inglés del Marco Común Europeo.

The profile of the students in Primary Education demands the use of communicative elements. Their immature minds make it almost impossible for them to cope with abstract concepts. In addition to that, the Communicative Approach highlights that the learners' needs, interests and knowledge must be always considered. Therefore, Educational Authorities have fostered the use of authentic, stimulating and familiar materials and techniques, such as games, to motivate the pupils and make them participate in the classroom.

We deal with an essential topic since students' motivation and interests are among the most important factors when learning a foreign language, and games contribute to create positive feelings towards English due to their connection with real life.

We can say that a game is an activity with a definite beginning and end, a goal and an element of fun and it is governed by rules.

Games fulfil several functions in the foreign language classroom. We are going to concentrate on the linguistic, pedagogical, psychological and social functions of games.

**Linguistic functions:** Games encourage unconscious learning since the pupils' attention is focused on playing the game rather than on the language used; therefore acquisition is fostered. Games enable the teacher to introduce, reinforce or recycle any aspect of language, providing lots of natural and enjoyable repetition and intensive practice for all pupils, since everybody is working at the same time. In addition to that, the four linguistic skills are developed in an integrated way.

**Pedagogical functions:** Games create a pleasant atmosphere in the classroom and motivate both good and weak students, because they are so engaged that they forget that they are learning English. This helps to develop positive attitudes towards the language.

**Psychological functions:** Games are an innate necessity in children. According to Piaget, play enables them to organize their thinking, interact with reality and build their knowledge. Freud claimed that children express their subconscious feelings and instincts through games, and this helps them to make sense of these feelings.

**Social functions:** Games are useful to develop social skills. Playing together is a shared social experience that develops the class identity. They also improve the relationship between the teacher and the students, because the distance between them is reduced.

We must pay attention to the two types of Language games: linguistic games and communicative games. Linguistic games help children to use language correctly. There are several types of linguistic games:

1. Vocabulary games focus on lexical items. Pelmanism is a vocabulary game played with cards that show words and pictures. The aim is to make pairs of cards: the card with the written word and the one with the corresponding picture. It can be played in pairs or small groups.
2. Grammar games focus on syntactic patterns. An example is Noughts and Crosses. The class is divided into two teams. The teacher puts a noughts and crosses grid on the blackboard, and writes grammatical elements in each square. Each team has to produce correct sentences. The aim is to get a row of three noughts or crosses in any direction.
3. Pronunciation games provide practice for sounds, stress, rhythm or intonation patterns. A phonetic Bingo in which students have words with difficult or similar pronunciations is suitable to work on the sounds of the language.
4. Spelling games make students aware of phoneme-grapheme correspondences. They are useful because English spelling is illogical and difficult for children. Hangman is a popular game to practise the way in which English words are written.

On the other hand, communicative games tend to develop fluency and collaboration with others. Pupils must exchange information and ideas, focusing on doing a task together, rather than simply practising language items. Correct language usage is secondary. The goal is for students to

communicate effectively. Information gap games, such as finding the differences in two pictures that are similar but not exactly the same are used to foster communication.

Games can also be classified into competitive and cooperative. Competitive games can be organized in teams, groups, pairs or individuals and they always have a winner. They tend to be linguistic games that focus on accuracy and in cooperative games pupils work together in order to describe, explain, agree and disagree...

The teacher must analyse the different games that s/he wants to use in order to decide if they are appropriate to the objectives that pupils must achieve. It must be checked that all the students have something to do and are involved most of the time.

Games used with a beginner's class must have simple language and be easy to explain, set up and play. Everybody must be able to participate and have fun. The teacher must check that less able pupils can take part without feeling frustrated. If that is not possible, the teacher can design a simpler version of the game.

Some games settle children and others stir them. Stirring games engage the pupils physically or mentally so they are very active. They are useful to change the pace of a lesson or when children are tired. On the other hand, games that settle pupils must be employed when the pupils are being disruptive.

It is interesting that linguistic games can be graded when necessary and adapted to fit in with different lexical sets or grammatical structures. Many games such as Bingo can be modified to link to the basic competences or to other subjects.

Pupils' initiative is also important. It is useful that they have some choice when they are playing the game and that they can adapt or extend the game themselves, so that they personalize it.

The main objective in Primary Education is that children are able to communicate using the foreign language. As it was explained before, linguistic games help children to use language correctly. However, being able to communicate requires more than linguistic competence; it requires communicative competence.

According to Canale and Swain, communicative competence includes four areas that can be developed through different types of games.

1. Linguistic games facilitate the acquisition of grammatical competence. It is concerned with the mastery of the language code: lexical items, syntax, semantics, morphology and phonology.
2. Role-play games in which children play roles in a specific situation are useful to work on sociolinguistic competence. It is concerned with the appropriateness of communication depending on the context including the participants, purposes of the interaction...
3. Discourse competence is concerned with the coherence and cohesion of utterances in a discourse. It will be developed through communicative games.
4. Strategic competence is concerned with the mastery of verbal and non-verbal strategies that are put into practice to compensate for breakdowns in communication or when communication

fails. Games in which children mime and use gestures or facial expressions are particularly suitable at this level.

These four sub-competences are complemented by socio-cultural competence. It implies the knowledge of certain socio-cultural factors that contribute to a better understanding of messages. It's possible for the teacher to invent simple games, but it is worthwhile doing some research into games and fun activities that already exist in the culture of English-speaking children to incorporate culture in the classroom.

In order for learners to develop communicative competence, the teacher must consider carefully when and how to use games.

## **WHEN TO USE GAMES**

Games can be incorporated into the different stages of the teaching-learning process with different aims.

They can be employed as warmers to increase students' motivation and expectations towards the new language. Then, in the presentation stage, the teacher introduces the new language in context and checks students' understanding. In this stage, the games must be played by the whole class, because the teacher is in control and mustn't demand verbal responses, since students can't produce new language yet. Games based on Total Physical Response, in which children respond physically to commands before they produce verbal responses, are perfect. One example is Simon Says.

In the practice stage games focus on accuracy. They can be played individually, in pairs or small groups. Crosswords, word squares or bingo can be used. When students are ready to use language in a free and creative way they can interact in pairs or small groups. The games at the production stage are designed to foster communication, like Find someone who.

## **HOW TO USE GAMES**

Once the teacher has decided which game to use and when to play it, s/he must prepare it in detail: aids, instructions of the game, organization of the students... Giving instructions is a very important stage. Each game will need a proper introduction and an explanation of what to do. The instructions need to be divided into small stages and explained by using gestures or visual aids like flashcards.

A short demonstration with one or two students is advisable, so that children know exactly what they have to do and the language they need to use. Wall charts can be used to provide useful language.

Teachers need to create an atmosphere which is as similar as possible to a real communicative situation. To do so, games must include varied interactions. Teams, groups and pairs need to be organized quickly. Preparation and discipline are essential as the teacher is not so centrally in control. Pupils need training in how to start and stop when the teacher tells them to, work quietly and listen

carefully to instructions. They must be familiar with a routine to minimize disruption when moving furniture and forming groups.

Group composition will depend on the game used. If the game requires an ability level, it is better to group weak students with weak students and able students with able students, so that children work at their own pace. In cooperative games, mixed ability groups are recommended, since students can help each other. It's often useful to have a group leader who is responsible for giving out materials, explaining details to the group... This role must be given to different pupils.

Everybody must take part in the game, even shy or less advanced learners. In order to achieve it, W.R. Lee suggests writing useful words or phrases on the board, sitting near the students who need help to whisper suggestions to them and encouraging students to help each other within their teams. According to Andrew Wright it is wrong to force students to take part if they are not ready. Students who don't want to participate can act as arbiters or scorers.

While the pupils are playing the game, the teacher has a key role. S/he observes pupils, monitors their language, gives explanations when necessary and writes down difficulties which may need re-teaching. S/he mustn't over-correct the children, because this can spoil the flow of the game and reduce enthusiasm.

## CONCLUSION

In this topic we have dealt with the importance of the use of games in English teaching, for this reason we must take into consideration that games are fundamental for children since they tend to see life in terms of games and anything else is seen as an obligation rather than something that they want to do. The integration of play and learning in the classroom will help English to become an important part of children's daily reality, increasing their motivation to learn it. ●

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